

Culture in Psychology: Then and Now

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Prefatory Comments

My “then” is the first IACCP (International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology) meeting in Hong Kong, 1972, which I attended. I take the “now” mainly from the 2014 IACCP meeting in Reims and a little from our 2013 IACCP regional meeting in Los Angeles. In general, I will speak of changes that have been very important and positive for the field. IACCP has both driven and responded to these changes.

The Acknowledged Meaning of Cross-Cultural Psychology

Then (1972)

Cross-cultural psychology had two meanings, one acknowledged, one not acknowledged. I start with the acknowledged meaning: The acknowledged meaning was comparative study; and every researcher at the 1972 meeting, myself included, was doing the cross-cultural comparison type. The idea of cultural psychology – psychological methods that would focus on cultural processes (Greenfield, 1997), a development noted by Yoshi Kashima in his presidential address in Reims - rather than cultural comparative - was not yet on the table.

Now (2013, 2014)

Now the study of culture in psychology is not methodocentric. That is, it is not identified with a single method; in other words, it is no longer identified with the single method of quantitative cross-cultural comparison. Indeed, methods and methodology have dramatically diversified. I will provide examples of this diversity from IACCP, Los Angeles, 2013, and from IACCP, Reims, 2014.

Los Angeles, 2013: Cultural neuroscience. In this plenary symposium, every presentation related culture to the brain through the use of fMRI. Basically, the presentations addressed the question, “What processes in the human brain allow us to construct cultural values?”

Reims, 2014: Big data. Igor Grossman’s symposium highlighted a number of big data tools such as the Google Ngram viewer. This database of millions of books in a number of languages over more than 200 years can be used to assess cultural trends in many parts of the world. In a presentation by Rong Zeng, hundreds of thousands of books in Chinese were used to assess features of cultural change in China from the Cultural Revolution to the development of a market economy (Zeng & Greenfield, 2015).

Reims, 2014: Culture as process. We now have many studies of cultural processes, such as intergenerational transmission and acculturation, that are being studied inten-

sively in a single culture. One example at the Reims meeting was a paper by Ayse Cakirsoy-Aslan and colleagues entitled “The effect of acculturation on attitudes toward honor among the Turkish community in the United States.”

The Unacknowledged Meaning of Cross-Cultural Psychology

Then (1972)

With the exception of David Ho from Hong Kong University, researchers at the Hong Kong meeting, again myself included, were crossing over into someone else’s culture. And these cultures were all in what has come to be called the “Majority World”. Prior to the Hong Kong meeting I had collected data for my dissertation among the Wolof in Senegal (Greenfield, 1966a & b; Greenfield & Bruner, 1966; Greenfield, Reich, & Olver, 1966). Many of the cultures we were crossing into had recently escaped from colonial rule or were still under colonial rule, sometimes by the nation of the researcher. For example, just a few years earlier, Senegal had ceased to be a French colony. Another Hong Kong participant, Sid Irvine, a Scottish citizen of the United Kingdom, had done research on IQ and other cognitive capacities in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), then a British colony (Irvine, 1964, 1969). He had done similar research in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), a British colony until 1964 (Irvine, 1969; Irvine, MacArthur, & Brimble, 1964). In fact, the ties among nations linked in the former British Empire were numerous. For example, John Dawson, the organizer of the inaugural IACCP meeting and an Australian, was studying the Chinese in Hong Kong; Hong Kong was still under British rule. Thus our science was not insulated from world politics and colonial relationships. The result was that, at the beginning of the field, almost all cultures that were the subject of cross-cultural psychological research were being studied from an outsider perspective.

Now (2014)

But David Ho was a harbinger of things to come. No longer is the study of culture in psychology mainly carried out by crossing over into other people’s cultures. We now have researchers in the Majority World studying their own cultures – on continents and subcontinents around the world: Africa, Latin America, Asia, India. This shift yielded the indigenous psychology movement (Kim & Berry, 1993). This movement asserts that every culture has its own psychology, which needs to be studied in a non-comparative manner, just as we, in the United States, study U.S. culture in a non-comparative framework. An example of indigenous psychology in the Reims program was the symposium entitled “The conception of emotion and self among Indonesian university students: Exploratory studies using the indigenous psychology approach,” organized by Kwartarini Yuniarti, an Indonesian psychologist. Most indigenous psychology privileges the insider perspective, just as psychology in my country, the United States, always has, without acknowledging it as such. The latter may be understood in the U.S. as “mainstream psy-

chology”, just as there may be a “mainstream” Lithuanian, Greek or Bolivian psychology.

But as we study the role of culture in psychology, we also realize the value of combining both insider and outsider perspectives – a perspective that is still often called “emic” and “etic” psychology. Clearly the insider (with emic credentials) knows his or her own culture in a way that an outsider wearing etic spectacles never can. On the other hand, culture, at its deepest level, consists of things we take for granted and of which we which we are not aware. The outsider can be aware of these cultural traits just because they deviate from what he or she takes for granted.

Now we have many collaborations between insiders and outsiders. For example, I am involved with a research group that includes both insider and outsider perspectives on the Arab culture in Israel. Besides myself, the outsiders on our team are Adriana Manago from Western Washington University in the U.S. and Michael Weinstock from Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Israel. Our insiders are Rana Ibariya & Maysam Ganayiem (Weinstock, Ibariya, Ganayiem, Manago, & Greenfield, 2014). At IACCP Reims, Rana presented on social change and cultural values across three generations in an Arab town in Israel – in fact it was the town she grew up in.

Then (1972)

There were no cross-cultural researchers from Eastern Europe or Russia at our meeting, although Vygotsky and Luria had done groundbreaking work in cultural psychology (Luria, 1976). But “cold war” politics kept us mainly apart.

Now (2014)

Now Russia and Eastern European countries are all over the program. For example, we find a symposium paper on “Collective identity and well-being of Roma adolescents in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Kosovo, and Romania” by collaborating researchers from all of those countries. This paper also illustrates the collaborative role of insider and outsider perspectives – the research group also includes two researchers from the Netherlands.

Gender Issues

Then (1972)

I was the only female researcher at IACCP in Hong Kong in 1972.

Now (2014)

Women are an army within IACCP. I did a random sample of two pages of the Reims program, categorizing names as male or female: 74% of lead authors were female. Women have also taken their place as intellectual leaders. On another page randomly selected, I looked at gender of first 10 symposium organizers on the following pages: 60% female, 40% male.

We had a woman running our biannual congress at Reims (Christine Roland-Levi).

The pioneer woman leader in IACCP was the late Ruth Munroe, who became Secretary-General in 1986. Between 1990 and the Reims Congress, we had three women Presidents of IACCP: Cigdem Kagitcibasi, Deborah Best, and Heidi Keller. At the end of the Reims congress, I became the fourth female IACCP president.



Video clip from Patricia Greenfield's talk

Migration, Biculturalism, and Globalization

Then (1972)

People tended to stay in their own countries to live – unless they were refugees. Therefore, biculturality was the exception rather than the rule. The study of acculturation had not yet begun.

Now (2014)

Migration is worldwide, with movement from rural to urban areas and from poorer to richer countries – these are social trends involving millions of people. We saw this phenomenon reflected in our program at Reims; in, for example, a paper session titled “Minorities and migration.” John Berry, a founder, prior President, and Secretary-General of IACCP, was a pioneer in studying the intersection of psychology and acculturation (e.g., Berry, 1983), a phenomenon that results from migration. This legacy can also be seen on the program; for example in the symposium chaired by Colleen Ward, “New perspectives on identity, acculturation, and adaptation.”

Our past president, Yoshi Kashima is originally from Japan, but now lives and works in Australia. He illustrates the new globalization of our field, where those born and raised in one culture area have made their home as professors in a different culture area. In both teaching and research, they bring insights from one culture area to their work in the culture area of their professional home.

Social Stability, Social Change

Then (1972)

Cultures tended to be rather stable. The topic of social change did not exist in our field.

Social change, rather than social stability is the rule. David Ho and his colleague T. K. Kang (1984) were perhaps the first in the field to consider the psychological effects of social change, witness their 1984 article on changing socialization patterns across two generations in Hong Kong (Ho & Kang, 1984). Social change and attendant cultural change is now a growing topic. Cigdem Kagitcibasi was a pioneer in studying the effect of social change in the form of urbanization and increased formal education on the value of children and other cultural values (e.g., Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005). Family change is also a theme seen in the Reims program. One paper session on this topic is entitled “Parenting in cultural change” and includes consideration of this topic in a diverse array of countries: Estonia, Hong Kong, Portugal, and South Asian immigrants in the UK.

Indeed, there were a number of symposia that focused on social change. Let me mention two symposia, one chaired by Adriana Manago and one chaired by Mary Gauvain. Together the presentations included the empirical consideration of social change among Israeli Arabs, different ethnic groups in Mexico, Africa, India, and around the world. In addition, there is at least one more paper session on social change: “Culture change and its consequences.”

An IACCP Constant: Geographic and Ethnic Diversity in Organizational Leadership

Within psychology, IACCP led the way in providing leadership positions to psychology researchers from the majority and non-Western worlds. David Y. F. Ho from University of Hong Kong was the first IACCP Treasurer, from 1972 to 1974. Very soon our organization inaugurated Presidents indigenous to many parts of the majority and non-Western worlds: Michael Durojaye of Nigeria (1976 to 1978); Durganand Sinha of India (1980-1982); Cigdem Kagitcibasi of Turkey (1990-1992); Janak Pandey of India (1994-1996); Kwok Leung of Hong Kong (2010-2012); and Yoshi Kashima, originally from Japan (2012-2014). The IACCP Executive Committee has, moreover, always been intentionally structured to represent all regions of the world.

The Language Issue

One must acknowledge, however, that English as our scientific language presents a disadvantage to researchers in many parts of the world and provides an unearned privilege to those of us born in an English-speaking country. This is a difficult and not obviously surmountable issue, one that plagues international scientists in every field. But because our field of study is culture and psychology, it is an issue that has especially great significance to IACCP. In order to reach our goals as a scientific organization, we must acknowledge this language issue and endeavor to do more to overcome it.

Because Spanish is spoken in such a wide geographical area, I believe that language is a major reason why IACCP has been less successful in attracting researchers

from Latin America into our organization than in other parts of the world. As President, I have been given the mandate of greater incorporation of Latin America into IACCP. Our next step is the regional IACCP meeting in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico in 2015; part of the plan is to incorporate some sessions in Spanish. I hope San Cristobal will be a venue where IACCP members from all parts of the world can expand their knowledge of cultural research by Latin American and Spanish-speaking psychologists and where we can integrate an expanded number of Latin American and Spanish-speaking investigators into our IACCP network.

In Conclusion

The goals and practices of IACCP have been responsible for many of the changes that have taken place during the last 40+ years. For example, the Witkin-Okonji travel awards have, over the years, enabled many researchers from low-income countries to participate in our scientific meetings. The Summer Schools have provided training for students from around the world, with a focus on students from low-income countries. IACCP’s free, open-access “Online Readings in Cross-Cultural Psychology” has provided tools for teaching about culture in psychology in areas of the world where up to date textbooks are scarce and libraries do not have access to costly online journals. Generally having our meetings on college campuses has lowered registration fees and broadened participation. Including lunches, receptions, and a conference dinner in the registration fee has democratized participation. Regional meetings every other year have broadened global participation. The Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, led by founding editor Walt Lonner, and essentially the flagship journal of contemporary research in this important area, has enabled the field to grow by providing an outlet for cross-cultural and cultural research when traditional outlets were not friendly to the concept of culture. Its original motto “. . .to study all that is human” is alive and well and has reified the very existence of a global, culture-oriented psychology.

At the 2014 IACCP meeting, we can see the culmination of many of these developments. The wonderful presentations by the participants of this symposium/roundtable testify to the scientific growth and increasing inclusiveness of the study of culture in psychology. I hope to continue and expand all of these progressive trends during my tenure as IACCP president, which began in Reims.

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